

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER
GENERAL

TERRY

WOLFF, COMMANDER, COALITION MILITARY ASSISTANCE TRAINING
TEAM,

MNSTC-IRAQ
(VIA TELECONFERENCE)

LOCATION: THE PENTAGON, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT

DATE: THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 2007

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JACK HOLT (director, DOD Press Office): And this is Jack. We'll see who's -- who just joined us?

GEN. WOLFF: Hey, Jack, how are you? This is Brigadier General Terry Wolff. How do you do today?

MR. HOLT: Very good, sir. Very good.

And let's see here. Let me get my -- get things set up here right quick.

Brigadier General Terry Wolff and commanding general, Coalition Military Assistance Transition Team from the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq with us on the bloggers' roundtable this morning.

And someone else just joined us. Who was that?

Q Good morning. This is Richard Fernandez from the Belmont Club.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Richard. Thank you for joining us.

General Wolff just dialed in, he's on-line now, and if we can get started.

General, do you have an opening statement for us?

GEN. WOLFF: Well, no, I really don't. I mean, I've talked to a lot of this group before. I mean, I guess what I would tell you, other than no formal opening statement, is that, you know, what my teams continue to do is to continue to help train the Iraqi military, specifically the army, the navy and then additionally we continue trying to work to help them build some additional logistical capability and capacity.

So I mean, I'll stop right there and certainly take any questions that you might have.

MR. HOLT: All right, very good. Thank you very much.

Andrew, why don't -- you were first on-line, why don't you get us started this morning.

Q General, thank you for speaking with us today. Andrew Lubin here from ON Point. I guess the question of the day at least over here is a follow-up of General Bednarek and General Lynch's interviews over the weekend, where he says the IAs aren't ready, they don't have weapons, don't have uniforms, don't have radios and can't hold what we're getting for them. You know, what can you tell us about this? There was kind of a surprise hearing it from the two of them.

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, that is a bit interesting, and I think -- you know, I went back and looked at kind of what they said, if it was -- if it had been written down. It struck me that it was -- you know, they made a sweeping generalization about a lot of Iraqi army units, and it's a little more complex than that. I mean, and so, you know, what each of them identified were certain weaknesses that certain units have in certain battlespace, and that is -- that's exactly kind of how it unfolded.

And then General Bednarek and I had some follow-on discussions as we kind of, you know, asked the Iraqis to go back and take a hard look at what they thought the logistical issues were as well as any training issues, and additionally we took a hard look at also, you know, where we thought ground troops was, was there something that those units had or didn't have that they needed in the fight, and if so, what was that. And by and large, you know, as I went back and reviewed that with General Bednarek, it was a little more complex a situation than was easily captured in a quick sound bite.

Let me give you a case in point. There were some concerns about, you know, the -- (inaudible) -- of logistics being a problem. And the way I kind of answer that is, yeah, there were some issues with some units that ran out of water, and so as you go back and look at that, you say, well, why did that happen, and what could have happened to prevent that? The Iraqis have contracted for their life support, and so they are using commercial contractors like we do for class one. And so those contract life support providers are supposed to have a certain number of days of stockage, and they failed to do that. So as units are out there operating in 115-degree heat, you can imagine what happens. They're consuming an exceptional amount of water, and the 4.5 liters per day that the contractor's supposed to provide them is being provided, but they're drinking more than that.

Q Exactly.

GEN. WOLFF: And so again, that's what we went back to try to see what was going on and what the Iraqis were trying to do to get their contractors to solve that problem.

So that's just one little, you know, tidbit I'll give you and just one of the comments that the general made.

Q Okay. Because when I was over there, the impression I had is that there is an awful lot of -- their warehouses are chock full of stuff. My hope when I listen to the interviews is that this was more of a logistical issue than a -- you know, it seems the quartermasters I met on their side, they're doing the job if the warehouse is full, they're not -- you know, if the warehouse is not full because it's in the field, it's like they're disappointed. Is that something that's involved in here too?

GEN. WOLFF: I think there's always a distribution challenge. You know, again, some of the warehouses that they tend to operate from are a little further to the east than

where the division's parent base is. You know, remember, as we talked before, we helped establish a regional base logistical system for them, and what grows a little more complex is when you're using more of the force in an area that's a distance away from where that geographical base is. And so then how are you using your transportation assets to move supplies, and are you anticipating what your consumption rates are going to be over time?

And again, that's some of the things that, you know, higher-level division logistical officers are supposed to be looking out for so that no soldier on the battlefield runs out of anything. I mean, that's the goal, is to make sure the fighting man's got everything he needs.

Q Grim, can I go one follow-up, to follow up --

Q Another? Right. Go.

Q Great. Thanks.

General, how is their -- you know, logistics, you know, beans, bullets, that can get resolved in an hour and two hours. How is their fighting spirit? How is the fighting capabilities?

GEN. WOLFF: I mean, from what General Bednarek told me, it's pretty good. I mean, I only asked him a couple of questions about that. I haven't been out to see the 5th Division now in about a month and a half, so I can't give you any more perspective. But, you know, he did not describe any lack of willingness for them to fight. But I'm really the wrong guy to ask that operational question to if you're trying to get more specifics than that.

Q No, that's good. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Thanks, Grim.

MR. JACK: Okay, thank you very much, Andrew.

Grim.

Q I'd like to trade off turns with Richard Fernandez of The Belmont Club. I think that he's likely to have something very interesting to ask, so I don't mind to go last instead of second.

MR. HOLT: All right. All right. Very good.

Well, Richard, why don't you go next?

Q Thanks. Basically, there's been a lot of talk about how -- Senator Lugar basically said he didn't see any hope at all in getting the Iraqis going as a cohesive unitary state.

And there was an interview lately by Austin Bay regarding how there are two clocks: the Washington clock, which is kind of impatient, and the field clock, which runs the way it will run.

I guess, my question is, my impression is that things are getting better. But are they getting better fast enough, you think, to keep the wolf from the door, to keep, you know, the politicians from, you know, getting very impatient? That's the question.

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, that's a hard question to answer.

I mean, you know, we recognize that there are two different clocks running here. And the comment I would give you is that, I think, sometimes in Washington, folks are looking at the second hand on the clock, and out here, the Iraqis are looking at the calendar. And there's just culturally a difference in how we approach issues in time and space. They look at things a bit differently.

And it's fine for folks, you know, it's fine for folks to have a different perspective in different national capitals. But again, the reality out here on the ground is, the Iraqis tend to move at a little different pace than we do, and that's just the way it is. We can try to change them as much as humanly possible, and we try to cause them to gain the same sense of urgency that we have, but there are things that make that a little more difficult.

And so we may be seized with it, because we recognize that the Washington clock is running. And the Iraqis, trust me, do recognize, there is a Washington clock. But is their system capable of adapting to it and to responding in as quickly, you know, a decision cycle as we have, you know, in our military?

That is a tough question, you've asked me, and I don't think I can answer it any better. I mean, I saw a little bit of General Lugar or, I guess, Senator Lugar's comments. I didn't see any of the follow-up that's been done if that's been done in the last day or so, but it is a good question. Is it fast enough?

You know, you saw General Martin Dempsey's testimony on the 12th of June, and I think he laid out a pretty thorough case regarding his thoughts about how long it would take. It will take some time here. And the challenge we have is that the Iraqi military is committed to combat operations, and so we're asking them to do everything faster while they're in contact with the enemy in, you know, part of this fight we have here. And so you're trying to move a large institutional mass, which has built a logistical system, at the same time you're trying to ensure that tactical logistics is provided on the battlefield at the right point and at the right time.

And so I'm not sure, I mean, and I think that's kind of the same answer General Dempsey gave. He wasn't exactly sure. We'll have to see. Although I will -- I do believe that Senator Lugar did argue that, you know, it's not pulling all the soldiers out; it's just pulling some of the soldiers out, and that you're going to have to take a good, hard look at what soldiers will continue to provide and do the sorts of things that we're doing here in terms of transition team assistance and coaches and teachers and mentors. I did not detect that Senator Lugar talked about asking all that sort of coalition force to depart.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jarred.

Q Thank you, sir.

Two-part question -- first, could you talk a little bit to the training of the Sunni tribes, both in Anbar, Diyala, the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades in Baqubah? What kind of efforts are being made to integrate them into the IP and the IA?

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, it's principally right now into the IP, and these, you know, police support units are just that. They're kind of like a police auxiliary, and there is an effort to get them incorporated. And there's a lot of work that's gone on out in Al Anbar, as you all well know. It's been reported fairly extensively, and it appears to be a good model in Al Anbar.

You know, it is being looked at in other places, as you would well imagine. Because certainly when you can get the locals to take up arms against al Qaeda, it's certainly helpful, especially with their knowledge of the local situations. So it is seen as an enabler. And in that regard, I mean, there's efforts out in Diyala to do similar sorts of things.

And again, there are other tribal members, I believe, that have come up on that end, said, "Hey, try it in our province or our neck of the woods."

So it looked -- it appears to be, you know, a fairly good -- a fairly decent model that should be looked at, province by province, based on the nature of the fight and the nature of the enemy in each. And as you all well know, the fight in many of these different areas is uniquely different.

The other point I would make is that these auxiliary units, as you will, must get training over time. And so they get some initial training, and then they're supposed to get -- go back and get additional police training in -- you know, over a certain period of time.

So it's not as if there's no intention of ever ensuring they get a reasonable amount of training. There's recognition that you have to do that eventually.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And Grim.

Q This is Grim of Blackfive. I apologize for the following question. I noticed - we were talking earlier about the Washington clock. I noticed yesterday in a document that was really about -- it was really a partisan document issued by the Senate majority leader's office about Republican obstructionism. As sort of a throwaway line at the last part of the document, it said that several hundred soldiers have died in Bush's failed surge policy. Do you feel that it is fair to say that the surge has failed?

GEN. WOLFF: No. Simple answer is no. I mean, I think you have to see how this plays out over time. And again, you know, eight months ago, everyone was talking to us about insurgencies take time, and that they have to be dealt with on more than just the security front. And we know that is true.

So the first task was to get additional soldiers in here. And the last of those five brigades has only been on the ground a couple of weeks, and it's just begun combat operations. And so in concert with the Iraqis, it's going to take a little bit of time to clear the areas that have not been cleared in a long time.

Again, you know, six weeks ago, eight weeks ago, 10 weeks ago, four months ago, everyone was seized with Baghdad. Well, other than the occasional, you know, large-scale IED or suicide vest or car bomb that gets through the checkpoints and other things here -- most of the surge forces are now operating in the -- in -- if you will, in the Baghdad belt or the other areas that surround Baghdad or reach up into Diyala and to Baqubah.

And so, again, you know, we tend to be fixated on, is this thing going to produce a result in -- you know, in the next 48 hours? And the answer is absolutely not.

The question is, you know, do we have the wherewithal to allow it to proceed long enough to determine whether it's going to succeed or not? And I think that's one of the key issues that has to be thought through.

Q I have a quick follow-up question. You say the Iraqis are very keenly aware of the Washington clock as well. Does that include the Iraqis on the other side?

GEN. WOLFF: You mean the bad guys?

Q Yes.

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, sure. I mean, how would you not know that if you're an Iraqi bad guy, whether you're an al Qaeda guy or you're -- whether -- you know, someone in -- you know, someone from the bad side of JAM, which is causing -- you know, causing extrajudicial killings? How would you not know that if you're looking at the Western media, the Iraq media, the Arabic media? I mean, what happens in the United

States in the capital -- in our capital of Washington is playing out all over media headlines.

So all you got to do is have a satellite dish now. I mean, I could see BBC at just, you know, a flick of a dial here, or take a look at CNN or take a look at any one of several Iraqi stations or Arabic stations. So to think that's -- to think that our opponents aren't looking at our -- the Western media and determining will, American will, is silly.

Q So these statements have consequences, then, on the battlefield.

GEN. WOLFF: Well, yeah, of course. All of our statements do. And so, I mean, again, you know, our politicians have a responsibility to the American people, and so do we. And we have to recognize that things play out in the media. And there are -- that's just a fact. And so we all recognize that.

Q Thank you. General, I apologize again for asking a question that may cause difficulty for you later.

GEN. WOLFF: No, I don't think so. Go ahead.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Well, we've got some time left here. Any follow-up questions?

Q I've got one. General, Andrew Lubin again from ON Point. Are combat ops winding down now? They seem to be a lot quieter from the really kinetic street-by-street, house-by-house, sewer-by-sewer quotes of last week.

GEN. WOLFF: Do you mean in Baghdad, or do you just mean in general?

Q Well, I'm talking the operation -- the big op that we've got going now, Phantom Thunder.

GEN. WOLFF: I mean, I think there is always a period when combat operations begin in which there is an immediate reaction by the enemy, as the enemy reacts to what coalition forces do. And then, you know, as you've heard folks talk about, particularly General Odierno and others, there's been some discussion about, hey, maybe a lot of the bad guys left, and perhaps some of the senior -- you know, senior members departed to allow their foot soldiers to continue fighting. That's not unusual. We saw that in Fallujah in '04. We've seen it many times repeated out. They basically leave the foot soldier there. They run away, and -- you know, and depart to try to save themselves, and they leave some of the -- you know, some of their footmen to continue fighting the coalition forces.

Q Right.

GEN. WOLFF: And then -- so after that initial opening salvo or two back and forth, there tends to be a bit of a lull while clearing operations continue. And then you tend to see, you know, some sort of counterattack, if you will, or something similar to that on kind of the COIN perspective that occurs.

So it may appear, you know, as if it's a lull, but there are still combat operations going on. The high sustained nature -- it may play out a bit below the surface and not -- and may not be quite as -- you know, as intense or the appearance of the intensity is less in comparison to the last week.

Q Okay. Great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anyone else?

Q I have question, sir. When you watch "Freedom Journal Iraq" or AFN or all these -- the military shows you see constant, you know, video clips, audio clips of the training mission under way. And you can actually see, you know, new units, new Iraqi units coming on line, being trained, you know, in counterterrorism, SWAT, whatever it is. You never see that on America media. Why is there such a failure on the part of the military in getting out the actual truth of what happens on the ground?

GEN. WOLFF: Well, here's kind of the challenge. I mean, all your questions today haven't been about training, really; they've been about current operations. And so when you begin to think about it, everyone is seized by what's happening in the current fight. I mean, we haven't done many sessions with you or others about Iraqi training and logistics because there's no appetite for it. In the last three or four weeks, the appetite has been for, what's the surge looking like? How is combat operations going to unfold?

But behind the scenes, the training hasn't slowed one beat. I mean, we -- you know, since you and I -- or most of you and I talked a couple of months ago, probably back in March, you know, we had barely -- we had just -- is we were trying to train about 30,000 replacement soldiers. We were starting about the third cycle of that, and that got us to about, you know, upper 15,000 to 20,000, you know, effective; in about five or six days from now, we will have graduated 35,000 replacements from that training program. That's not bad, and the Iraqis are continuing to train those soldiers.

We're looking hard at leader training. We have done things to help the Iraqis get a 4th Brigade of the 4th Division stood up, which is kind of referred to as the Samarra Brigade. Its training is still -- it's ongoing, but that unit is formed.

Since we talked last, there's a brigade that's part of the 9th Division that has been formed, and it continues on with its training. It'll be a little while before it's ready, but those sorts of things are still happening.

As an example, we've had a lot of luck continuing to work with the Iraqi leaders to get them to better embrace some of the logistical challenges they have to work

through. They're standing up a support command, which was something that we working with them on, but we're getting a little closer to get the headquarters portion of it stood up. We have some additional work to do with all the subordinate organizations. But the first step is getting our Iraqi brothers to buy into this and recognize its importance and utility, and they've begun to do that.

I talked to you a lot last time about tactical logistics and how they're doing with that. And again, with each passing day, although there are challenges in Baqubah because of the way the operations unfolded a bit there, by and large, they're tactically supplying themselves with, you know, Class I, which is food and water, yet -- albeit it's by contractors, but they're getting it done, they're paying for it. They're getting a lot of fuel off to themselves. They can't supply their military 100 percent, based on what they need, but they are distributing the fuel that they are allocated. Generally, they could get ammunition moved around tactically when they need it -- yes, an occasional unit does run out of bullets, but that's a rarity -- and we're trying to get their ammunition system to be a little better.

They're trying to work through their maintenance challenges. You know, you we have helped provide them over 14,000 vehicles, and now we're trying to help work with them to get them off a maintenance system which was mostly contracted to one in which they're going to do the maintenance themselves. And there'll be growing pains. Each of these transition periods where we take them off something that has been contracted because they want to do it themselves has normally a, you know, about an eight to 12-month transition period as they begin to get control of things and make the decisions that make all this operate.

So those are the sorts of things that are happening in the scenes behind the security operations that are ongoing here every single day, and you know, a lot of times there are just a lot of tiny steps that are going on, but we are making some progress. And I'm sure that would generate another question or two.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anybody else? Any follow-ups here?

Q Just one. I mean, I am struck by your comment that the preparatory work, all the really important stuff is not exciting in a political sense. Isn't there some -- like I remember this old documentary, "The Memphis Belle," which when you think about it, it really wasn't about anything. It was about the preparatory work. I mean, they just try to make it exciting back in 1943. Isn't there some way that this can be humanized and cast in a way that, you know, excites the traditional media? It's just a thought, really.

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, I mean, it really -- that is an interesting thought, and I think -- you know, what you all offer is kind of that tie-in to larger audiences because you can talk about some of those and you all have a following based on people who know little about the military and have, you know, watched with you as you blog and get other folks interested in this, sure. The mainstream media, you know, isn't going to give us -- isn't going to give us the nanoseconds required. I mean, truly you have to acknowledge

when Paris Hilton challenges, you know, for the front page of any newspaper -- well, not newspaper, but on major networks, you have to acknowledge there's not going to be a lot of appetite for what's happening in the two training centers in Iraq.

But you are right, there is a human interest angle from it, you know, at least from coalition soldiers who are doing great things. I mean, I've got Australians that are helping me with a lot of this training. The Australian commitment has been, you know, has been increased significantly in the training team business. They're helping us with both logistical things and then other training things at a couple of locations -- really a good news story that hasn't been covered much at all -- where the Australians had -- you know, they have a brigade down at Tallil, but additionally, they've had a training team down there that's done a lot of training, oversight at one of the Iraqi regional training centers. But they've increased the size of their commitment because they're helping us more with logistical and maintenance training and logistical training operations up at the major training center, Taji, just north of Baghdad, certainly a good news story.

Now that's going to play out in Australian media pretty well. We have an Australian transition team lead here who's working the team that works in the joint headquarters, and he is also making a significant contribution with the coalition folks that he is working with to help their joint headquarters build some capacity. But again, sometimes that's like watching paint dry, but the human interest aspect of it is pretty good because there are a lot of great folks out here trying to, you know, help them improve a little bit every day.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And well, that's just about all the time we've got for this morning, sir.

Any parting comments or closing thoughts?

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, I guess I think I would just probably close with the following, that, you know, you're hearing a little bit about Diyala because what was discussed in the media interviews out there, and you're certainly hearing a little bit about, you know, what was described down in the area south of Baghdad, in the Marne area of operations. And to some extent I think we all have a greater hope that the Iraqis continue to improve, and sometimes I think that's why you get a bit of these comments. We all want them to be better and their leaders want them to be better, too. There's no lack of desire here.

I've said this before, that I will get real concerned when the Iraqis begin to give up on themselves, and that is not the case. There is nothing that I see that indicates that. There truly are daily challenges that we encounter, whether it's in the training or log business, or, you know, things that happen out there on the streets as part of the security fight that are reported upon. But what we do see from, you know, the Iraqis is a commitment to continuing to improve and a desire and a passion to be more responsible

for all things military. They very much want to be able to do this themselves. When they don't, then I will be concerned, and I will share the concerns of others back in the United States that, you know, it's truly time to completely reshape this. I'm not at that point now, and I'm -- I remain -- I'm the eternal optimist anyhow, but I remain encouraged by this.

And so they are making decisions. With every day they are more in charge. They tend to make decisions that we don't always agree with, but so be it. In many of those instances, they don't reflect the lack of desire or will; they reflect the fact that they're going to choose courses of action that may be just a bit different than the way we would do that. I cannot find fault with that, but that's the nature of sovereignty and the ability to make decisions for yourself and then have to deal with those consequences.

So I'd just pass that on. That's kind of like motherhood and apple pie, and you all know that. But I am not -- I continue to be encouraged by the fact that they are trying to improve.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

Brigadier General Terry Wolff, the commanding general, Coalition Military Assistance Transition Team for Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq. Thank you very much for being with us, and it's very encouraging that you're encouraged. Thank you very much, sir.

GEN. WOLFF: Well, thanks a lot, and my thanks go to all those great coalition soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines that continue doing this job every single day. And so they are what encourages me even more than my Iraqi brothers.

Thanks a lot.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir. We appreciate it.

GEN. WOLFF: Bye-bye.

Q Thank you, General.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you.

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